

# **The Longitudinal Relationship between Self-Help (SH) Attendance and Recovery Course**

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# **Abstract**

Most alcohol and other drug (AOD) abuse clients participate in self-help (SH) programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous at some time, but few studies investigate longitudinal SH attendance patterns. The present study examines the relationship between SH attendance patterns and functional outcomes over 24 months. Participants were 620 AOD treatment seeking clients participating in the larger PETS study. All clients' AOD use, arrests, and unemployment levels decreased between intake and 6-month follow-up. Cross-sectional analyses revealed that SH clients' AOD use was generally lower and use of psychiatric medication higher than non-SH clients. Unemployment and arrest data were variable. Longitudinal analyses focused on 4 SH attendance groups: Full Attendees, Starters (at 6 months), Stoppers (at 24 months), and Non-attendees. Steady SH participation was associated with lower AOD use, and Full Attendees' employment levels increased over time. Non-Attendees showed no sustained improvements in AOD use or employment levels from intake to 24-months follow-up. More detailed analyses are planned.

# Background

- Most self-help research has focused on Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).
- Most substance abuse clients report prior AA attendance at intake (Humphreys et al., 1998).
- AA involvement has been associated with: greater resource utilization; being separated/divorced; more psychiatric & employment problems; lower income; more alcohol-related problems; lower education (Humphreys et al., 1996, 1998); being African American (Kaskutas et al., 1999); authoritarianism; social stability; and loss of control (Ogborne, 1989).
- AA attendance has been associated with:
  - Decreased drinking and lower treatment costs (Humphreys & Moos, 1996; Timko et al., 2000), regardless of adjunct treatment (Timko et al., 1994).
  - Fewer incarcerations (Watson et al., 1997), although it may be less predictive of overall improvement (Emrick, 1989).
- Most long-term SH studies report on the later outcomes of initial SH attendees. Few have examined SH attendance longitudinally.

# Purpose

- To characterize clients who participate in self-help (SH) (AA, NA, CA).
- To investigate the longitudinal relationship between SH attendance and major outcome variables: alcohol & drug use, unemployment, & arrests.
- To conduct a preliminary investigation of grouping clients by longitudinal SH attendance patterns.

# **Overview PETS Cuyahoga Study**

- Participants were 1,259 substance abuse clients from 2 Adult Treatment Network Sites in CSAT's Target Cities Program in Cuyahoga County, OH.
  - All major treatment modalities represented.
  - Data collected through the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services Board of Cuyahoga County Treatment Network and coordinated by the University of Akron.
  - Clients interviewed at baseline, 6-, 12-, 24-, and 36-months.

## **Present Investigation**

- Examined interview data from sub-sample who provided SH program attendance data at intake, 6-, 12-, and 24-months.
- Description of sub-sample at intake (n = 620):
  - 54% male, 74% African American, mean age = 36, mean years education = 11, 82% unemployed, and 70% unmarried.
  - Most commonly used substances at intake: alcohol (69%), crack (50%), marijuana (30%), and heroin (14%), based on past 30-day use.
  - 64% reported prior substance abuse treatment; 46% reported SH involvement in past 6 months.



# Measures

- Computer Assisted Central Intake Assessment Instrument (CIAI-C)
- Interview Measures Used in Analysis:
  - **Self-help (SH)** = attended in past 6 months (yes/no)
  - **Alcohol/Drug use** = any use in past 30 days
  - **Arrests** = any in past 12 months (intake) or 6 months (follow-up)
  - **Psychiatric medications & unemployment** = current (yes/no)
- Constructed Variables:
  - Categorized participants into attendance pattern groups based on SH attendance over time:
    - **Full Attendees** (Attended all waves, ***n*=160**)
    - **Starters** (Attended all waves but intake, ***n* = 121**)
    - **Stoppers** (Attended all waves but 24 months, ***n* = 48**)
    - **Non-attendees** (Attended no SH, ***n* = 56**)

# Results: Cross-Sectional Data

- Demographics similar for SH vs. no SH (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, marital status).
- Drug use, arrests, & unemployment decreased from intake to 6-month follow-up, with changes retained (Table 1).
- Compared with Non-attendees, more SH Attendees reported:
  - No alcohol use at intake and all follow-up waves (Table 1).
  - No drug use at all follow-up waves, although intake drug use did not differ between groups.
  - Arrests at intake, *BUT* fewer SH Attendees reported arrests at 6 months than Non-attendees.
  - Unemployment at intake, but no group differences remained at follow-up.
  - Taking psychiatric medications at intake and 6- and 12-months follow-up.



# Results: Longitudinal Group Patterns

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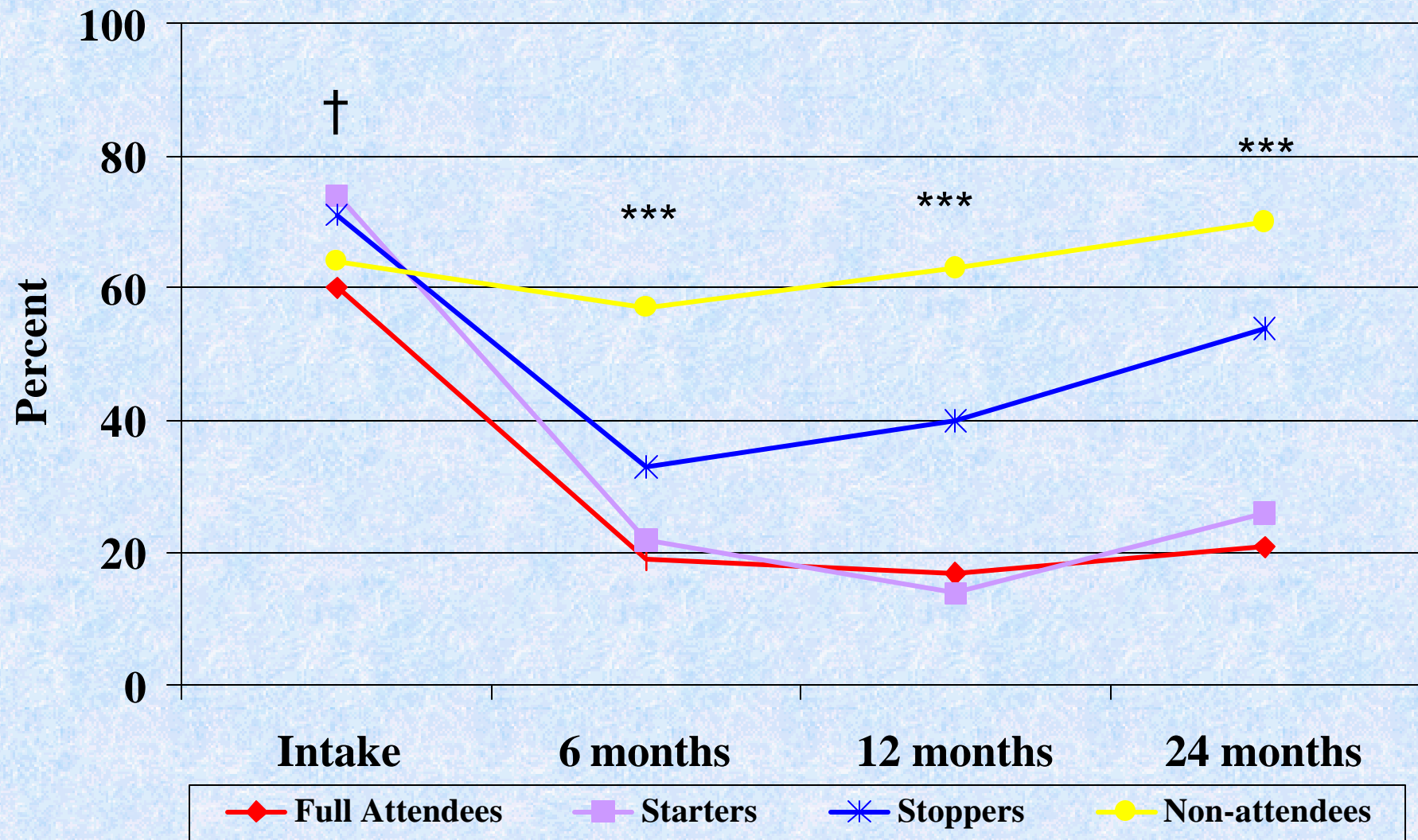
- Groups similar on gender, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, and psychiatric medications.
- Group difference on age ( $p < .05$ ): Non-attendees youngest ( $M = 34$ ), Starters oldest ( $M = 38$ ).
- Longitudinally, alcohol use showed strongest group relationship (Figure 1):
  - Slight group differences at intake - Full Attendees were lowest use group.
  - Non-attendees stable all 4 waves while other 3 groups dropped at 6 months.
  - At follow-up, Non-attendees had highest use, Full attendees and Starters lowest, and Stoppers in between.
- Drug use dropped among all groups at 6 months, but only Non-attendees returned to baseline levels by 24 months (Figure 2).
- Non-attendees' drug use highest and Full Attendees' lowest over time.
- More Full Attendees unemployed than Non-attendees at intake and 12 months, but levels declined among Full Attendees, but not Non-attendees (Figure 3).

# Table 1. Problems by SH Attendance

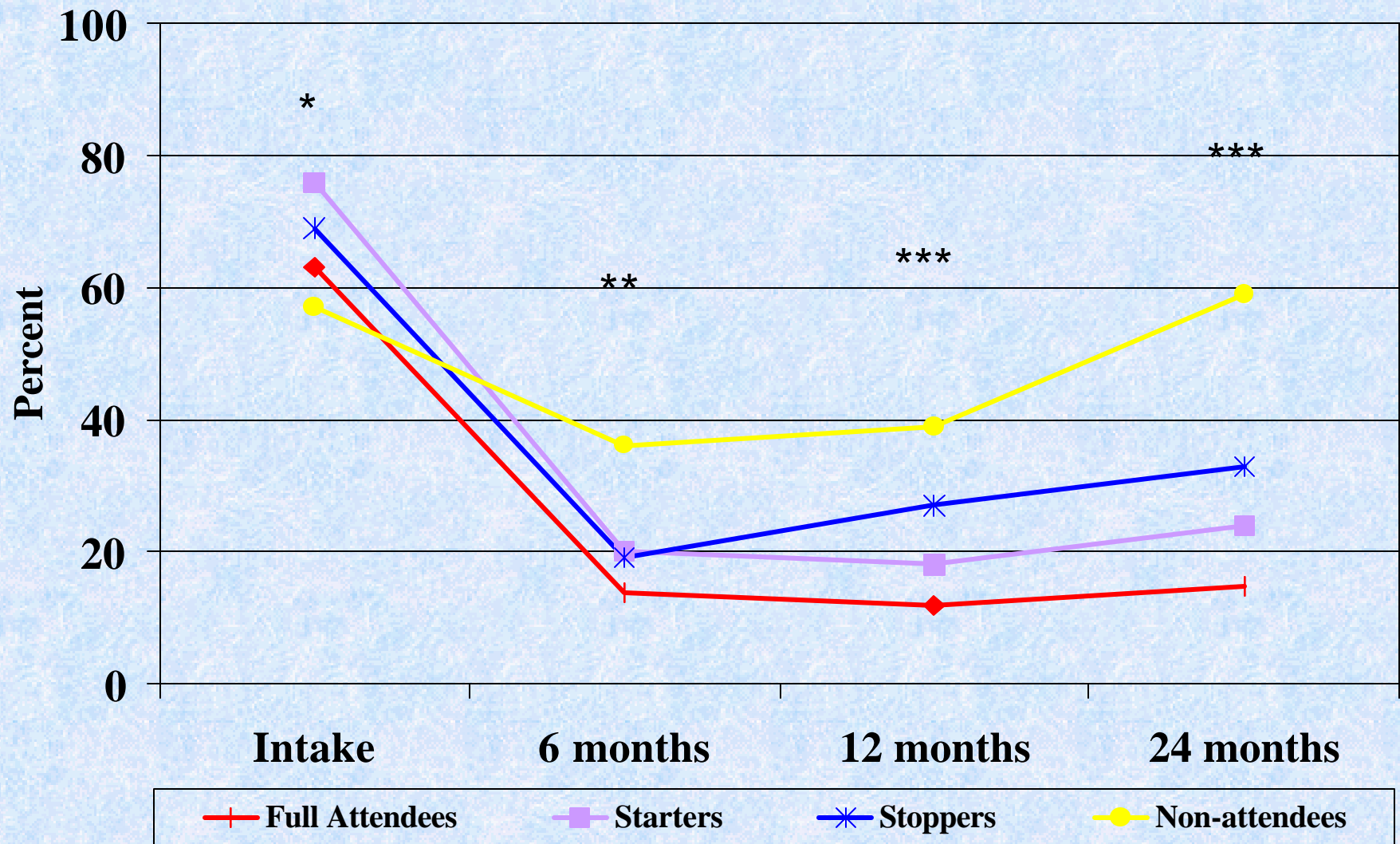
	SH Status	Intake	6 months	12 months	24 months
Alcohol use	SH	*64	***29	***25	***25
	no SH	72	59	56	60
Drug use	SH	66	***20	***21	***22
	no SH	73	43	43	44
Arrests	SH	**47	*12	10	12
	no SH	32	19	10	10
Unemployment	SH	***82	58	55	54
	no SH	71	63	52	52
Psychiatric	SH	**14	**14	*14	11
medications	no SH	8	5	8	12

Note. Numbers are percent of clients in each group. SH = self-help.

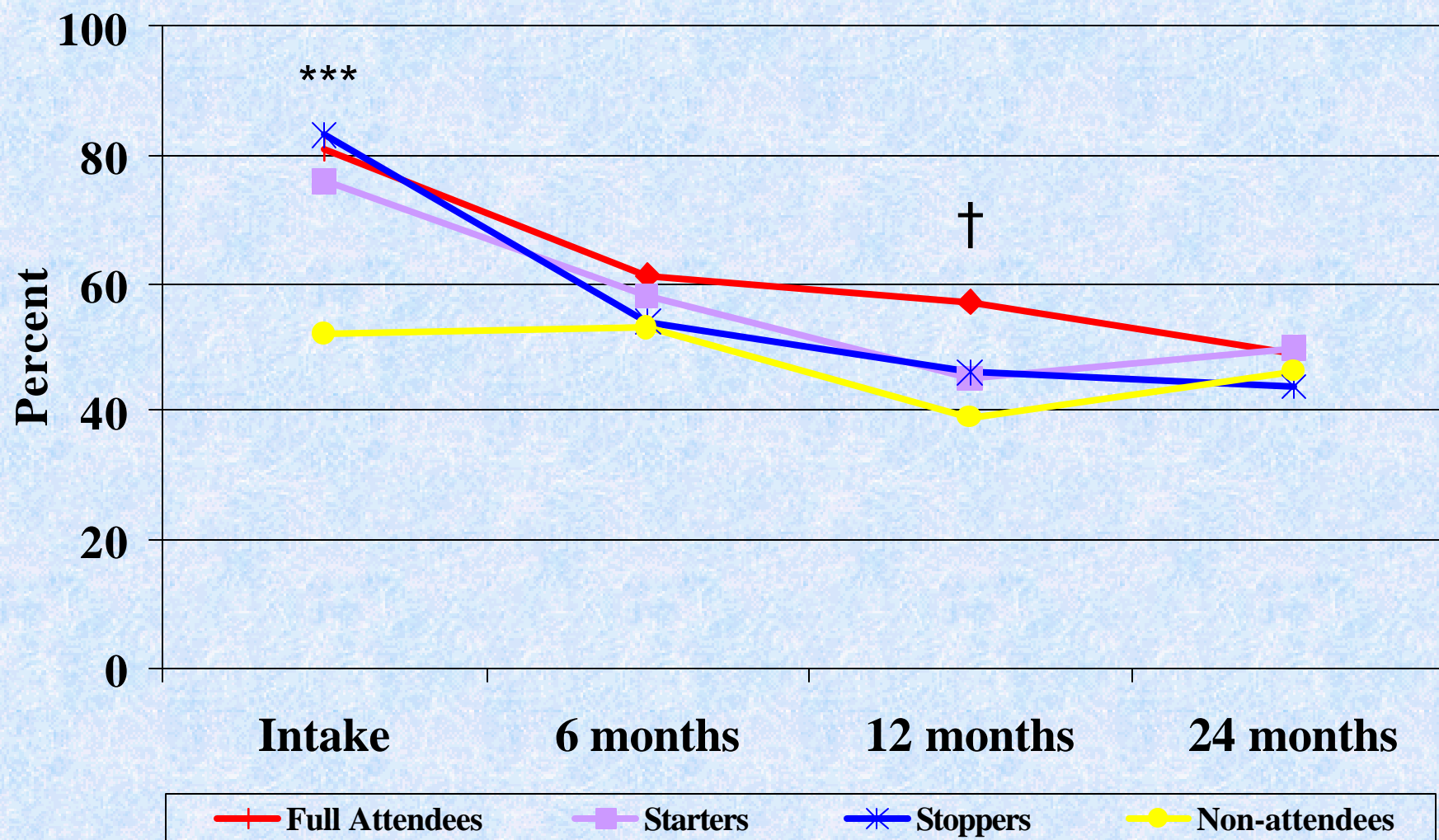
# Figure 1. Alcohol Use by Self-Help Group



## Figure 2. Drug Use by Self-Help Group



## Figure 3. Unemployment by Self-Help Group



# Conclusions

- Steady SH attendance was associated with less drug and alcohol use over time.
- At intake, greater problems (i.e., arrests, unemployment, psychiatric medication) were associated with history of SH attendance. Steadier longitudinal SH attendance groups were more likely to be out of work.
- General improvement from intake to 6 months (independently of SH) may reflect positive effects of other treatment received, treatment seeking at crisis point, and/or regression to the mean.
- Limits: Small N for some analyses, esp. arrests and psychiatric meds.
- Future analyses:
  - Refine longitudinal SH attendance group definitions.
  - Examine other treatment relative to SH and its outcomes.
  - Use administrative services and arrest data.
  - Investigate SH attendance dose and continuous variables of use and other outcomes.



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## Note for Figures

- †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .